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Guru Nanak Dev Mission Series 332

Guru Nanak's Impact on History

BY DR. GANDA SINGH

with

introduction by Prof. Harbans Singh

Guru Nanak Dev Mission Patiala

P. O. SANAUR, PATIALA.

Punjab India

It was some day in the second half of July 1963. When Dr. Ganda Singh & myself during an evening walk talked of doing something towards the dissemination of the Sikh Gurus' message and to give the idea a practical shape it was discussed in a meeting of the Sikh intelligentsia of Patiala on the 27th of the month and thus come into existence, the Guru Nanak Dev Mission.

Dr. Ganda Singh's contributions to the Mission by way of his learned articles and guidance otherwise, have been tremendous. His contribution to Sikh History on its various aspects is unparalleled & he will always be remembered by posterity for this.

The Guru Nanak Dev Mission Executive has considered to set up a 'Dr Ganda Singh Memorial Trust' with the objective of encouraging young people to write on Punjab History with particular reference to the Sikhs. A sum of Rs. 9000/- has already been contributed for the purpose and the Mission may also do something in this respect.

Narain Singh

Secretary

Dr. Ganda Singh

THE MAN-THE HISTORIAN

by Prof. Harbans Singh

For nearly half a century, Dr. Ganda Singh had been the most celebrated, most endearing name in the world of learning. By his persistent and critically important research and writings he had become a vital and pervasive influence in historical scholarship in the Punjab. Through out his life he had been impelled by one single passion of exploring materials pertinent to Punjab history. Beginning with no advantage other than his own initiative and determination, he covered decades of productive research of high quality and finesse. Over the years, his work had been dearer to him than anything else. He had allowed nothing to lure him away from it. Nor had he succumbed to any difficulties or trials of which he had seen many in his life. He remained indifferent to fame and prospects of material advancement, and shunned the limelight. There was truly a touch of nobility about the selfless and studious way he pursued the calling of his choosing and achieved a complete identity with it.

Dr Ganda Singh's has been a major role in the evolution of Punjab studies in India and abroad. His

long and distinguished career as a teacher fostered generations of new scholars, while his own work—encompassing dozens of books in English and Punjabi and many a learned paper—had set high standards in terms of academic integrity and discriminating use of source materials. In a profession susceptible oftentimes to factions and fashionable or profitable trends of interpretation, Dr Ganda Singh had stubbornly proclaimed that only honest pursuit of historical truth, of true scholarship, ultimately revealed the character and worth of a scholar. Such commitment attested to by his own publications and by his unremitting industry and forthrightness will stand as a permanent model. These, however, are not the limits of Dr. Ganda Singh's contribution to historical research. He had led in preparing bibliographies and discovering and protecting rare sources-to key elements for any future work

Dr. Ganda Singh was born on November 19, 1900, at Haryana, an ancient town in Hoshiarpur district of the Punjab. Early in his life, his mind was stirred by the interreligious polemic raging in the Punjab at the beginning of the century. He was drawn to reading regarding Sikh literature. The Stories of Sikh heroes of the eighteenth century and their brave deeds and sacrifices made a deep impression on his imagination. This was the origin of his interest in Sikh lore. The liberating impulse generated by Singh Sabha, the Sikh renaissance movement, gave a critical bias to his study of history. A deeply embedded streak of adventure, tough physique and a strong, indomitable will were the other constituents of the equipment of the future historian of the Punjab

Dr Ganda Singh interrupted his studies at Forman Christian College, Lahore, to join the Indian army in the Third Afghan War. He served in the Supply and Transport Corps Base Depot at Rawalpindi in 1910. In 1920-21, he was with the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force joining in 1921 the Royal Army Pay Corps, British Army, Basra, in Iran where he spent nine years (1921-30) with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, he came in touch with Sir Arnold T. Wilson, then engaged on his Bibliography of Persia. Sir Arnold encouraged his literary interests and introduced him to English journals and societies devoted to oriental studies. In Iran, he also started building up his private library, which today is perhaps the largest collection under a single roof of materials on the history of the Sikhs. He purchased books from all parts of the world and undertook tours of England and other Western countries to visit libraries and bookstores.

He published his first book, *My First Thirty Days in Mesopotamia* which was in English, while he was still in Iran. His next two books, *Inkishaf-i-Haqqiqat* and *Sikkhi Prachar* were in Urdu and Punjabi, respectively. The urge to take up historical research in more systematic manner brought him back to India in 1930. His object was to collaborate with Karam Singh who had done valuable pioneer work in the line and who, by his impassioned writings, had aroused considerable interest in the study and investigation of Sikh history. But before Dr. Ganda Singh could meet him, the latter had died. Dr. Ganda Singh settled down in Lahore and joined the *Phulwari*, a journal devoted to Punjab

letters and history,

He soon moved to Amritsar where he was offered a teaching and research appointment by the Khalsa College. The College had just opened a department of research in Sikh history which was placed in his charge. This was the beginning of very prolific period of his career. Starting from nothing, he built the research department of the Khalsa College into a leading institution of its kind in India. He equipped it with the rarest books and manuscripts. His summer holidays every year he spent travelling across the country collecting for his College materials bearing on the history of the Punjab. Copies of many rare and valuable Persian manuscripts from different collections in India transcribed in elegant calligraphy by his faithful amanuensis, Maulavi Faiz-ul-Haq kept pouring into the Research Library of the Khalsa College.

His first major work was a biography, in English, of Banda Singh Bahadur. The book, a model of meticulous historical composition marked by accuracy of detail and authenticity of evidence based on original and contemporary sources of information, proved a signal success and instantly attracted scholarly notice. A few more biographies, equally well-documented, followed. Three of these, Maharaja Kaura Mall, Sham Singh Attariwala, and Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, were in Punjabi; Ahmad Shah Durrani, doctoral thesis, was in English.

After eighteen long years at the Khalsa College full

of hard, unflagging labour and dramatic achievement, Dr. Ganda Singh came to Patiala and joined appointment in Patiala and East Punjab States Union as Director of Archives. He stayed in this post until his retirement in 1956. During this time, he did not allow his official responsibilities to impinge on his scholarly pursuit. He edited volumes of government records and published numerous learned papers and books. A notable work was *Private Correspondence Relating to the Anglo-Sikh Wars (1955)*. In this book was collected a voluminous mass of letters written by English army and political officers dealing with events preparatory to the annexation of Sikh dominions. In light of the evidence thus assembled the story of the occupation of the Punjab stood stripped of the sophistry which had till then surrounded it and of the facile simplifications of the writers of history textbooks. To this correspondence Dr. Ganda Singh added an elaborate introduction which revealed the range of his historical erudition and his powers of cogent reasoning. As Director of Archives at Patiala, he helped salvage from the Punjab princely states, then under abrogation, a vast amount of historical material and organized it into a systematic collection of records, manuscripts and books. A permanent monument of his association with PEPSU Government was the Central Public Library at Patiala which was of his creation. Another important monument was the Khalsa College at Patiala of which he became the founder Principal after his retirement.

In 1963, the newly established Punjabi University

invited him to set up for it a department for research in Punjab history. This meant the beginning of another spell of sustained, creative work. Dr. Ganda Singh charted a unit which soon developed in to a dynamic centre of research. De novo started the quest for bibliographical and manuscript materials. Publication of primary sources on the history of the Punjab was sponsored. Work was started on a comprehensive eight-volume history of the Punjab; another project undertaken was a four-volume series of documents on Punjab's part in the national struggle for freedom, in 1965, Dr. Ganda Singh founded the 'Punjab History Conference, and in 1967 the journal Punjab Past and Present' which he continued to edit till the end. His famous A Bibliography of the Punjab was published in 1966.

Marks of honour had been numerous. In 1963, the Punjab Government invested him with the State Award for Literature for his services to the cause of language and culture. In 1964, Aligarh Muslim University conferred upon him the degree of D. Litt. (Honoris Causa). On March, 28 1964, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee honoured him for his monumental work in Sikh history. He was similarly acclaimed by the Sikh Educational Conference at its 52nd annual session at Kanpur October 25-27 1974. The Padma Bhushan awarded to him for his standing in letters he returned as a protest against Operation Blue Star of June 1984. He was president of the medieval session of the Punjab History Conference at Punjab

University, Patiala, in 1968, and president of the Institute of the Historical Studies, Calcutta, for its 12th annual session at Shillong in 1974. He presided the 35th session of the Indian History Congress at Jadavpur, Calcutta, in 1974. That year he also presided the 13th annual session of the Institute of Historical Studies at Panaji Goa.

Critical discrimination was a characteristic of Dr Ganda Singh's intellectual discipline. With this he combined an extraordinary capacity for marshalling historical facts and a conscientious regard for truth. His patience and industry were phenomenal and his archival sense immaculate. To Punjab historical studies his contribution is of permanent value. In some areas, his work broke new ground. Several of his published books were acknowledged as the most authoritative on the subjects they dealt with. On certain periods of the history of the Punjab, such as the eighteenth century and part of the nineteenth, he ranked as the first knowledgeable of scholars. These he documented with minute painstaking. Another criterion by which Dr. Ganda Singh's achievement will be judged as the groundwork he laid for future research the new materials he brought to light and the bibliographies he compiled.

No one ever carried his learning more lightly, in spite of the magisterial authority he enjoyed in his field of learning Dr. Ganda Singh remained a modest generous man. He was warm in affection and always

ready to help. Vast numbers of young scholars had benefited from his advice and from his very magnificent private collection of books and manuscripts. There could scarcely be a doctoral thesis written in recent years on the Punjab history in India or abroad which was completed without reference to him or to his library.

Apart from his work, Dr. Ganda Singh's personality exacted both admiration and reverence. His spirit of dedication and selfeffacement, and his deep humility, truthfulness and courage were attractive traits. A man of strict rectitude himself, he was always magnanimous in judging others. The bitterest experience did not sour his goodwill. His generosity inspired devotion and friendship.

A crisis brought out his native love of adventure. He automatically assumed a position of command in such a situation and spared himself no risk or hazard in performing whatever duty he was called upon to undertake. An unusual amalgam of scholar and man of action, Dr. Ganda Singh had achieved a remarkable balance between his natural enthusiasms and his powers of mental detachment. This gave him his scholarly poise, without denuding him of his human qualities.



Guru Nanak's Impact On History

—Dr Ganda Singh

Over six million Sikhs, playing a conspicuous role in the social and political life, not only of India, their homeland but also of all the countries in the east and west wherever they have domiciled as permanent immigrants or as temporary residents, are a living practical example of the impact of the life and teachings of Guru Nanak on history. Like the Guru himself, they are a practical people, always up and doing, bubbling with energy, ready to be yoked to solve the problems of life. They are never afraid to put their hand to any type of work that comes their way and they would strive every nerve to make it a success. And it is by sheer dint of hard work that they have won a place for themselves in their occupations and professions. The world knows them as one of its bravest of soldiers both of peace and war. With his hand at the handle of the plough or at the steer of the tractor, the Sikh is the hardest peasant who becomes one with the land for raising his crops. But he is at his best in the field of battle when he is called upon to fight in defence of his motherland or for the protection of the weak and helpless, at home or abroad. Guru

Nanak's belief in the Unity of God and selfless service of mankind has given to the Sikhs their character of unswerving faith in God and Guru and in patriotism and sacrifice, with which they not only freed the Punjab from under the yoke of the oppressors and usurpers in the eighteenth century but also carved for it, under Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the first half of the 19th century, a place of strength and honour on the international map and made a gift of it to India to stand as a sentinel on its northwestern frontier to defend it against all future invasions from that quarter.

The teachings of Guru Nanak related more to the spiritual uplift of mankind and social good will and understanding among people of different creeds and classes, based on the common fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. According to him there is but One God who is All-Truth, Immortal, Unborn and Self-existing Creator Fearless and without hate. He is neither the Allah of the Muhammadans nor Rama or Krishna of the Hindus, but God of the universe of all mankind and of all religions. For the promotion and advancement of human goodwill and happy relations, Guru Nanak refused to recognize the man made distinctions of castes and classes, of high and low, rich and poor. And he condemned with all the force at his command the aggression of one over the other of the rulers over their subjects, both in the field of politics and of religion. He stood for the freedom of conscience and expression. He was the strongest advocate of the cause of women. He would attach no impurity to them because of their sex

nor would he hold them in compulsory subjection to men. He gave them the fullest responsibility in all matters, spiritual and social, and regarded them in every way equal in the sight of God.

But Guru Nanak was not a visionary idealist or a speculative theorist. He preached no complicated philosophy couched in unintelligible language of the other-worldly people. He was a practical man, one with the men of this world. He spoke to the people in the language of the people and explained his ideas to them with examples drawn from everyday common life. Guru Nanak's laboratories, both for the demonstration and practice of his teachings, were the institutions of sangats or congregations and pangats or the sitting of all people together in rows for community dining. Both at home and outside wherever he went, he established sangats or congregations of his followers and admirers. Therein they met daily generally in the evenings, to hear the Guru's teachings and sing his hymns and to pray to God and to discuss and solve their common problems. The forums of the sangats were known as dharamsalas. These later on developed into Sikh missionary centres where the Guru's work of reformation and transformation was continued by subsequent Gurus and their leading representatives, popularly known as masands. It was in these sangats and dharamsalas that the Guru's Sikhs learnt practical lessons in Sikhism, freed themselves from the worship of gods and goddesses and idols and images and recited the hymns of the master and his successors as the only way of the worship of

of the One Supreme Formless God. It was here that the Sikhs as the followers of the Guru were known, shook off their old prejudices and rubbed off their angularities. Here they came closer to one another in-faith and understood their real relationship as sons of the one common Creator. This popularised among them the use of the word of Bhai or brother, by which Guru Nanak addressed his companions and disciples like Mardana of Muslim origin and Bhai Bala Bhai Buddha, Bhai Lehna (his successor) coming from amongst the Hindus. The Sikhs ignored the monopoly of the Brahmans in matters religious and social as they did not subscribe to the Brahmanical faith. Maubid Zulfiqur Ardistani (Azur-Sasani), the Parsi author of the *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*, who had seen Sikhism in practice at Kiratpur under the direct guidance of Guru Hargobind and Guru Har Rai in the forties of the seventeenth century, tells us :

‘There is no restriction among them that a Brahman may not become the disciple of a Khatri, for Nanak was a Khatri, and no Guru among them was from the Brahmans as has been described. Similarly they placed Khatriis under the authority of the Jats who belong to the low caste of the Vaishyas, as the big masands of the Guru are mostly Jats. The Brahmans and Khatriis become pupils and disciples of the Guru through the medium of masands and accepted into the pupilage and discipline of the Guru” (p. 233)

Not only this. Some of the popular saints whose hymns the fifth Guru incorporated in the Sikh holy

book, the Guru Granth Sahib were not only Muslim by birth but also came the lowest of the low Hindu and Muslim classes. For example there are Sadhna ; a Muslim butcher ; Kabir a weaver, Ravidas, an untouchable cobbler ; and Sain, a low caste barber, in addition to Mirasi rebeck players.

Thus, with the Fatherhood of God preached by Guru Nanak was the real brotherhood of man recognized and established in practice by the religion of the Sikhs. The tenth and the last Guru Gobind Singh, in his time went a step further. On the introduction of the baptismal ceremony for the order of the Khalsa, he made the initiates drink the baptismal water the Amrita one after another, from one and the same vessel in a double round—the first man becoming the last to drink it in the second round. This practice abolishes for the Sikhs the distinctions of the high and low for all time to come and places them on a plane of absolute equality. And we have practical examples of this levelling in the subsequent history of the Sikhs. Within two years of the death of Guru Gobind Singh, when the Khalsa under the leadership of Banda Singh freed the eastern Punjab from under the galling yoke of the Mughals and established therein the rule of the sons of the soil, no distinction was made in the appointment of the ruling officials and distribution of other offices. William Irvine tells us in his *Later Mughals* :

“In all the parganas occupied by the Sikhs, the reversal of previous customs was striking and complete.

A low scavenger or leather-dresser the lowest of the low in Indian estimation, had only to leave home and join the Guru when in a short space of time he would return to his birth place as its ruler, with his order of appointment in his hand. As soon as he set foot within the boundaries, the wellborn and wealthy went out to greet him and escort him" [Vol. 1, 98-99].

This was a thing unimaginable in traditional Hinduism and had a revolutionary effect upon the history of northern India. It created among the Sikhs a much stronger bond of unity and made a new people of them with a separate nationality which, within half a century of untold sacrifices at the altar of national freedom, developed into a group of republican states, growing ultimately into the full fledged sovereign state of the Punjab. The ruler of this Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a Sikh no doubt but the kingdom was not a theocratic Sikh state. It was a state of the people of the Punjab, whatever their religion. Its capital was at Lahore and not Amritsar, the religious headquarters of the Sikhs, and its administration, both civil and military was shared by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs alike, nay a number of European and American Christians were as well employed in high offices. The Prime Minister of the then Punjab was a Hindu. The minister for foreign affairs, which included political transactions with the neighbouring Muslim states, hostile at times, was a Muslim. The army was commanded by offic-

ers drawn from all classes, the artillery being manned predominantly by Muslims.

On the religion side, there is no priestly class among the Sikhs. Anyone, man or woman, competent to recite and explain the hymns of the Guru Granth Sahib, may conduct the religious services in the Sikh temples and lead the congregation in prayer. Men of all castes and creeds have free access to the gurdwara or dharamsalas, as the Sikh temples are called and they can, with out any let or hinderance, join the congregations there and partake of the sacred *parsad* and of the meals served in the community kitchen or *Guru ka langar*.

In the matter of eating, the Sikhs have greatly contributed to the freedom of the people and have removed all old taboos. The *Dabistan* tells us the story of a Hindu boy, who for freedom of eating the food of his choice, wished to become a Muslim. One Partap Mall Gyani told him : "Why do you become a Muhammadan ? If you have an inclination to eat everything, you may become a Sikh of the Guru and eat whatever you like" [239].

The teachings of Guru Nanak were not individualistic in their outlook and attitude of life. They had a socialistic embrace with the result that not only the priest-oppressed Hindus, particularly of the third and fourth castes, the exploited Vaishya peasants and the suppressed Sudras, were drawn to his new faith but a number of the Muslims were as well attracted by the

teachings and ways and manners of the successors and followers of Guru Nanak. This became a cause of complaints to the Mughal Emperors, Akbar and Jahangir, by the closed-minded Brahmans and fanatical Muslim mullas against the fifth Guru Arjan. The liberalminded Akbar found no fault with Guru and his compilation of the Sikh scripture. On the other hand, he appreciated his efforts for the spiritual and social well-being of the people and favourably considered his suggestion for reduction in the increased taxes that had become oppressive for the ryots (Akbar-nama, vol. iii, 514-15 ; Sujan Rai Bhandari, Khulasat-u-Towarikh, 425)

Emperor Jahangir however, for political expediency, succumbed to the pressure of the Muslim revivalists, evidently of the Naqshbandi Shaikhs and ordered the arrest and execution of Guru Arjan. The Emperor himself records it in his memoirs the Tuzak-i-Jahangir, page 35, saying :

“There lived at Goindwal on the bank of the river Beas, a Hindu named Arjan in the garb of a pir and shaikh, so much so that he had by his ways and manners captivated the hearts of many simple minded Hindus, nay even of foolish and stupid Muslims ; who called him Guru. From all directions fools and fool-worshippers were attracted towards him and expressed full faith in him. For three or four generations they had this shop warm. For years the thought had been presenting itself to me that either I should put an end

to this false traffic or he should be brought into the fold of Islam. When this news (of the Guru having shown special favour to Prince Khusrau) reached the ears of our Majesty and I fully knew his heresies, I ordered him to be brought into my presence and having made over his houses, dwelling places and children to Murtaza Khan (Shaikh Farid Bukhari) and having confiscated his property, I ordered that he should be put to death with tortures."

Very significant indeed, in this context, is a letter of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi Mujaddid-i-Alif-Sani to Shaikh Farid Bukhari, entitled Murtaza Khan the governor of Lahore, referred to above. The Mujaddid writes :

"The execution at this time of the accursed Kafir of Goindwal, with whatever motive, is an act of highest grace for the followers of Islam" (Makutbat-i-Imam Rabbani, Nol. I Part iii, letter No. 193).

The execution of Guru Arjan for his religious activities was an act of high-handed tyranny aimed at the suppression of the Sikh movement and was a repetition of the oppressive policy of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century Sultans of India which the great Guru Nanak had fearlessly criticised and condemned in the strongest terms saying :

The kings are butchers, and cruelty their knife. The sense of duty and responsibility has taken wings and fled" (Majh Var 1, 16-1).

Again,

“Kings are like leopards and their revenue collectors (behave like) dogs ; they go and awaken people at all odd times, their servants wound the people with their claws and lick their blood like curs” (Matihar Var I).

The Guru felt shocked and outraged at the sack of Saidpur (Eminabad) during the third invasion of Babur in 1521 and burst out shedding tears of blood :

“Babur rushed down from Kabul with the bridal procession of sin and by force demanded the hand of the bride (of India). People sing the paeon of murder and smear themselves with saffron of blood (Tilang I, ghar i).

Guru Nanak was greatly moved to see the pitiable sufferings of Indian women at the hands of Mughal soldiers. “The women who wore beautiful tresses have their locks shorn with scissors and dust is thrown upon their heads : dishonoured and with ropes round their necks, they are caried by soldiers” (Asa I Asht xi).

“If a powerful person were to attack another powerful person”, said the Guru, “there shall be no ground for grievance, but if a ferocious lion were to fall upon a herd of cattle, the master (the protector) of the herd has to answer for it” Asa I, 39).

In equally strong language, Guru Nanak upbraided the so-called masters of the herd, the Lodhi Sultans of India, for not standing up manfully for the defence of their subjects and allowing the precious gem of the country to be easily snatched away by the foreigner.

To quote his own words : "The dogs (the Lodhi rulers) have thrown away the invaluable gem ; when they are dead and gone no one will remember them with regard". (Asa I).

These sayings and other admonitions of the great Gura had come down as a heritage to Guru Hargobind who succeeded Guru Arjan after the latter's execution under the orders of Emperor Jahangir. Guru Hargobind then felt that a stage had come in the development of the Sikh people when they should be able to demonstrate their will to resist the evil of tyranny. As human history knows, tyrants are generally power-mad autocrats. No philosophies and religious teachings, however sublime and heart-touching, appeal to their conscience hardened by repeated acts of oppression. They are dead to all sense of humanity and are a curse to society and the country at large. Bowing down to them is cowardice and is an encouragement to and prolongation of zulm—injustice and cruelty over the weak and helpless. This is what Guru Nanak had protested against and condemned. Guru Hargobind, therefore, decided to sanctify the use of arms like the operation knife of a surgeon who uses it, as a last resort, to separate and save the healthy part of the body from a spreading ulcer. To initiate the community into martial ways, he himself wore two swords at the Akal Takht at Amritsar as emblems of spiritual and temporal authority—Piri and Miri—combination of bhakti and shakti of deg and tegh—the kettle to feed the needy and hungry and the sword to protect the weak and

helpless. This was the first step towards the transformation of Sikhism into a militant church and its followers into saint-soldiers and soldier-saints. According to the Dabistan 'the Guru had seven hundred horses in his stables ; and three hundred cavaliers and sixty artillerymen were always in his service". This was the first corps of Sikh volunteers raised by the Guru at Amritsar for service.

But Guru Hargobind was not a mere soldier. He was primarily a saint, a Guru, sixth in the line of spiritual inheritance from Guru Nanak who had permitted no aggressive designs against anyone. Guru Hargobind's martialization, therefore was purely for self defence and for the defenceless. When the great Maratha saint, Samarth Ramdas, during his north Indian rambles, met Guru Hargobind at Srinagar in Garhwal in about 1634 and questioned him on this change, he replied : 'Internally a hermit, and externally a prince. Arms mean protection to the weak and destruction to the tyrant. Guru Nanak had not renounced the world, he had renounced (maya the sense of attachment and possession)'' This explained the Guru's meaning of the change, hearing which Ramdas said, "yeh hamare man bhavtihai-this appeal to my mind" Panjah Sakhian No. 39).

Although Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh had to fight as many as eighteen battles, either against local chiefs or against the Mughal government, they were all defensive. Never, in anyone of them, was the

initiative taken by the Gurus nor, as a result of their victories, was an inch of the enemy's territories occupied or towns and treasures plundered or a single captive carried. Nay, when approached Guru Gobind Singh was ever ready for peace-negotiations. Not only this, when Bahadur Shah, after the death of Emperor Aurangzeb, who had been responsible for the execution of the Guru's father (Guru Tegh Bahadur) approached the Guru, he readily agreed to help him with a detachment of Sikhs in the battle of succession at Jajau, June 8, 1707, in support of his rightful claim to the throne. This was the real Guru Gobind Singh, true, in word and deed, to the teachings of Guru Nanak.

"He who is imbued with the fear of the Lord becometh fearless, for one becometh like the one, one serveth" was said by Guru Nanak in Rag Gauri, Asht. vii-4. And in his definition of God he says in the Mulmantar that the True Creator is fearless and without enmity, And truly these two qualities have become an integral part of the Sikh character as has been demonstrated time and again. Once convinced of the righteousness of their cause the Sikhs will, in all fearlessness, be prepared to make every sacrifice-even the supreme sacrifice to uphold it and would smilingly walk into the jaws of death so that the survivors in the community at large might enjoy the fruit of its success.

After the death of Guru Gobind Singh when the Khalsa, under the command of Banda Singh, was engaged in a life-and-death struggle against the Mughal

empire for the liberation of the Punjab from under its yoke, they never reduced it to a communal strife against the Muslims whose coreligionists the Mughals were. The struggle of the Khalsa was purely a political one against the tyranny of the ruling people and not against the religion of the Mughals, although under the Emperor's orders of December 10, 1710, the Sikhs, on the other hand, were "killed at sight wherever found." In April 1711, within four and a half months of the issue of this royal edict, the Sikh commander, Banda Singh had proclaimed : "I am not opposed to Muslims" as such. The Mughal news-letter of April 29, 1711, tells us that "for any Muslim who approaches him (Banda Singh), he fixes a daily allowance and wages and looks after him. He has permitted them to read khutba and namaz, with the result that five thousand Muslims have gathered round him. Having entered into his friendship, they are free to shout their call (azan) and recite their prayers in the army of the wretched" (Sikhs) (Akharat-i-Mualla (Jaipur) ; Rugat-i-Aminud-Daula, No. 3 Dasiur-ul-Josha, 6a).

And when Banda Singh and his 794 Sikh companions were brought as captives to Delhi and were being executed at the rate of a hundred a day (March 5-13, 1716), they with the name of God on their lips—Wahiguru, Wahiguru — fearlessly welcomed the executioner's sword and called him mukta, a deliverer. In the words of the British ambassadors, John Surman and Edward Stephenson, who were eyewitnesses to this

grievously massacre, "It is not a little remarkable with what patience they undergo their fate, and to the last it has not been found that one apostatised from this new formed religion" to save his muddy vesture of decay (Letter No. XII. to the President and Governor of Fort William and Council in Bengal dated Dilly, March 10, 1916).

Now about Banda Singh. On June 9, 1716, when the flesh of his body was being torn with red hot pincers, the Mughal Prime Minister, Muhammad Amin Khan, questioned him on the fierceness of his struggle against the Empire. "I will tell you", said Banda Singh, "whenever men become so corrupt and wicked as to relinquish the path of equity and abandon themselves to all kinds of excesses, Providence never fails to raise a scourge like me to chastise a race so depraved but when the measure of punishment is full, then He raises men like you to bring him punishment." What fearless composure of mind and a peaceable calmness and stoic self-control, brought about by Guru Nanak's teachings ! (Siyar-ul-Mutakherin, 404 ; Raymond, i, 91 ; Briggs, 76-80)

The institutions of sangat and pangat (mixed congregations) and Guru ka Langar (mixed community dining), established by Guru Nanak as mentioned earlier, had not only a levelling and equalising effect upon the Sikhs, but had also strengthened their cohesion as a separate nationality and democratized their social, religious and political organizations. The

organization of the Dal Khalsa and republican nature of the Sikh misals during the eighteenth century also had their birth in the sangats. Sir George Campbell, who had seen this system in actual practice in the cis-Sutlej areas in the eighteen-forties before the annexation of the Punjab, tells us ;

“The Sikh system is very much like that out of which the German system sprang. They formed misals or military confederacies. Each misal elected its own supreme chief and sub-chiefs, and every horseman had his rights and his share in the common conquests. The combined misals formed the ‘Khalsa’ or Sikh Commonwealth’ (Memoirs of My Indian Career, i 46)

Speaking of the republic of Mahraj which he knew intimately, he says ;

“Mahraj remained an independent republic till with the rest of the country, it came under British protection. It was really a very complete, fully equipped republic. It was diplomatically recognised as a state. There were no chief or hereditary rulers ; the state was governed by its panches or representative elders. There was nothing of any feudal system or any division into conquerors and conquered. Unhappily as I think, this interesting republic was soon after wiped out when all the smaller Sikh states were mediatised and reduced to the position of British subject (Ibid i, 42-43).

When Maharaja Ranjit Singh integrated and consolidated the territories of some of the misals into the kingdom of the Punjab, he said that the kingdom

is reality, belonged to the Guru and that he was only his raptia a chaukidar (watchman). And always remembering the words of Guru Nanak'' bhullan andar sabh ko, abhull Guru Kartar—everyone is fallible, the Supreme Creator alone is infathible'—Maharaja Ranjit Singh never behaved like an infallible autocrat. We have on record, reproduced in facsimile in *The Real Ranjit Singh* by Fakir Syed Waheedudin, two of the Maharaja's farmans-and there might be many more which have not come to light as yet—wherein he had authorized Syed Faqir Nuruddin and Sardar Amir Singh of Lahore to withhold and bring to his notice for amendment any order of the Maharaja himself or of the princes royal, the Prime Minister or of the chief Sardars, if, in the opinion of the Sardar, it was inappropriate. To quote, in English translation, one of them addressed to the Syed (p. 31-32) :

“Sincere Well-wisher, Fakir Nuruddin ji, May you be happy ! It is hereby decreed by His Highness with the utmost emphasis that no person in the city sh uld practise high handedness and oppression on the people. Indeed, if even His Highness himself should issue an inappropriate order against any resident of Lahore, it should be clearly brought to the notice of His Highness so that it may be amended. Protector of bravery, Malwa Singh should always be advised to dispense justice in accordance with legitimate right and without the slightest oppression and further more, he should be advised to pass orders in consultations with the panches and judges of the city and in accordance with

the shastras and Quran as pertinent to the parties, for such is our pleasure. And should any person fail to act in accordance with your advice or instructions, you should send him a formal letter so that it may serve as a proof on the strength of which His Highness may punish him for disobedience..."

Despatched from the court of His Highness, 31st Bhadon. 1885 Sambat (September 13 ; 1825 A.D.)

This was, perhaps, the only order of its kind in the history of the world issued by a king authorizing a subordinate officer of the state to withhold any order issued by the king himself which, in the opinion of that officer appeared to him to be inappropriate and oppressive. The credit for this extreme humility in the interests of the people goes to the follower of Guru Nanak, who had enjoined upon kings to take a vow of dedication to impartial justice. (Sarang Var I, vii-2).

The Sikhs have also proved themselves to be no less formidable in nonviolent moral warfare. In 1922, in the Guru ka Baga struggle, they took a solemn vow at the holy Akal Takhat at Amritsar to offer satyagrahe and under all circumstances to remain nonviolent in word and deed. On the refusal of their volunteers to disperse under the orders of the police interfering with their religious liberty, their parties of 100 each were mercilessly beaten day by day and thrown into roadside ditches to be picked by medical relief parties. These nonviolent soldiers included among them many a veteran of the Frontier campaigns and of the First

Great War. But not one of them raised his little finger against the police or uttered a word of complaint. The reports of eyewitnesses sent to the press from the place of occurrence stirred the conscience of the world. In the words of the Rev. C.F. Andrewa, "a new heroism, learnt through suffering, has risen in the land. A new lesson in moral warfare has been taught to the world by the followers of Guru Nanak."

At Jaito on February 21, 1924, the Sikh satyagrahis literally ran into the jaws of death in the face of machine-gun fire and ultimately, came out successful in their twenty-two week long struggle against the Government.

In January 1922, after the success of the Sikhs in their nonviolent struggle in the Golden Temple Keys affair, Mahatma Gandhi congratulated Baba Kharak Singh the then President of the Shriomani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee saying 'First Decisive Battle For India's Freedom Won-Congratulations' [Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement, II].

"As regards nonviolence, with its attendant conception of self-sacrifice," wrote Lala Lajpat Rai, "they have given the most amazing proofs at Nankana Sahib and later at Ajnala and Amritsar. They proved themselves worthy descendants of their Gurus and the examples they have set of self-sacrifice and courage, devoid of swagger in the face of provocation, will be hard to beat."

The above is a brief account of how the life of

the people came to be transformed under the impact of the teachings of Guru Nanak and his successors. They had, in fact, stirred the inner soul of the people and had freed them from the thralldom of the priestly classes. Freed from the worship of idols and images, they came into their own and introduced into the country a monotheistic casteless and classless society of manly servants of the people—and order of fearless saint-soldiers, the Khalsa—who in their turn, made innumerable sacrifices to free their land from its tyrannous rules and foreign usurpers. And they ultimately succeeded in creating on the northwest, an independent sovereign state of the Punjab and made a gift of it to India to serve as the guardian of its honour and independence.



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The Mission is a non-profit organisation. None of its workers or executive members is a paid employee. Accordingly the booklets are made available for free distribution at mere cost price. Members of the Mission get these free of charge.

The life membership fee is Rs. 150/- in India and Rs. 300/- abroad for surface mail service and 500/- for Air mail. Annual subscription at home is Rs. 20/- only. At least 20 publications are mailed annually. By now i.e. April, 1988 the Mission has published 332 booklets.

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